

EZEQUIEL VIÑAO THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



STEPHEN GOSLING piano

SIMURGH is a trilogy based on the *Mantiq ut-Tayr*, a mystic poem written by the twelfth century Persian Sufi Farid Attar. Most of what is known about him is legendary. Reportedly, he was a hundred and ten when, during Nishapur's plundering, he met his death at the hands of Tule, the son of Jenghis Khan. Garcin de Tassy relates the discovery, in 1862, of a stone erected around 1500 (some two hundred and fifty years after Attar's death), on which was engraved an inscription that he rendered as follows:

God is Eternal . . . Here in this garden of a lower Eden, Attar perfumed the soul of the humblest of men. This is the tomb of a man so eminent that the dust stirred by his feet would have served as collyrium to the eye of the firmament . . . and of whom the saints were disciples . . . In the year of the Híjra 586 he was pursued by the sword of the army that devoured everything, and was martyred in the massacre which then took place . . . Increase, O Lord, his merit . . . May the glory be with Him who dies not and holds in his hands the keys to unlimited forgiveness and infinite punishment.

The *Mantiq ut-Tayr* tells the story of how the remote king of the birds, the Simurgh, first manifests itself by dropping a magnificent feather in the center of China. The birds, tired of their ancestral anarchy, decide to look for him. They know that their king's name means thirty birds; they know that his castle is beyond the Kaf, the circular mountain range that surrounds the world. After long deliberation, they decide to undertake an almost infinite adventure. To reach Him, they must overcome seven valleys: the name of the penultimate is Vertigo, the last one's Annihilation. Many pilgrims desert, others perish. Thirty, purified by their labors, set foot on the King's castle. At last, in a state of contemplation, they realize that the Simurgh is each and every one of them.

THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS or Book of the Search (1991) was premiered by Phillip Mead in London on 2 March, 1993. The first book concentrates on the exuberant imagery of the "Conference" or "Parliament" section of the poem up to the point when, "drawing cries of fear and apprehension," the birds decide to "face the road without end, where strong winds split the vault of heaven."

The form of the INVOCATION is that of a classical Indian alapa, which is marked by the absence of rhythm. The emphasis, then, is on the temporal proportions -the duration- of tones. Each note of the harmonic-melodic mode is introduced sequentially, elaborated upon and embellished.

Praise to Him, who has placed his throne upon the waters . . . To the heavens He has given movement, and to the earth uniform repose . . . In the beginning He gilded the stars . . . then He dried up the bed of the sea and from its stones brought forth rubies . . . sometimes He made clusters of roses spring from the face of the fire.

THE CONFERENCE OPENS can be thought of as an extended rondo. The piano plays the part of the elected leader of the flock -the Hoopoe-, who proceeds to address the objections raised by the rest of the birds, as played by the electronics. Each bird has its own rhythmic cycle -a tala- and a distinctive sound world that relates to its symbolic significance in the text.

All the birds of the world, known and unknown, were assembled together . . . and begun to consider how to set out on their quest . . . we have a true king . . . He is close to us, but we are far from Him . . . before Him hang a hundred thousand veils of light and darkness . . . first the birds begun excitedly to discuss

the glory of this king . . . but when they begun to realize how long and painful their journey was to be, they hesitated and begun to excuse themselves, each according to his type . . . then begun a commotion, everyone talking at once . . . and their eagerness to renounce everything revived.

IN THE BIRDS SET OUT motives interrupt one another creating a discourse where the listener may selectively understand larger structures of juxtaposed thematic materials as units of meaning or conversely focus on the development of each musical idea independently. Overall there are three sections identifiable by the return of the initial tremolo texture unfolded into rhythmic patterns.

Fear and apprehension drew plaintive cries from the birds as they faced a road without end, where the strong wind of detachment from earthly things split the vault of heaven . . . at the setting-out place, so great was the number of birds who flocked there that they hid the moon, but when they saw the entrance to the first valley, they flew up to the clouds in fright . . . then the Hoopoe spoke to them . . . and the Nightingale gave forth a melody so sweet that all who heard were lifted out of themselves.

Argentinian-American composer EZEQUIEL VIÑAO has been described by the members of the Juilliard String Quartet as a “particularly personal and intimate musical voice,” one that “combines an encyclopedic musical knowledge with an eclectic compositional philosophy.” Viñao’s work is often spoken of in relation to the diverse sources that shape it, and, in particular, his dramatic use of rhythm. After the premiere of ‘Sirocco Dust’, a string quartet commissioned by the Library of Congress and Stanford Lively Arts, The Washington Post remarked how “cheers

and whistles resounded through the Auditorium -the groove and texture were almost electric- the composer received vociferous applause." But his music also draws on medieval sources, especially Old Spanish chant, to create melodic contours that unfold quite slowly into vast harmonic fields. His 'Arcanum', for example, was described by Le Monde de la Musique as a work "of great contemplative beauty." And there is also a practice Viñao calls "reinterpretation," which could be understood as the re-contextualization of past narratives (or disciplines.) We find aspects of this technique as far back as in 'El Sueño de Cristóbal', an early orchestral score revised in 2010 for the re-inauguration of Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires (Clarín -the largest newspaper in the Hispanic world- found the work "masterful.")

Viñao has worked with a wide range of presenters: the list includes Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and City Opera in New York; the Almeida Theatre in London; the Musikverein in Vienna; the Kennedy Center in Washington; the Bourges Festival in France; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Helsinki Biennale; the Tanglewood, Ravinia and Aspen Music Festivals; The Tramway in Glasgow; Stuttgart's Liederhalle in Germany, and the Shobí Institute in Tokyo. He has collaborated with musicians as varied as Dennis Russell Davies, Paul Hillier, Kristján Jarvi, Anne Akiko Meyers, Joseph Kalichstein and Cristina Pato; with ensembles such as Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France; American Composers Orchestra; Buenos Aires Philharmonic; Absolute Ensemble and Lincoln Center's Chamber Music Society; as well as with the Juilliard, St. Lawrence and Brentano String Quartets. Viñao has also received significant institutional recognition: a Friedheim Award from the Kennedy Center; a First Prize from UNESCO's Latin-American Rostrum of Composers; five ISCM First Prizes (International Society for Contemporary Music); an Endowed Fellowship from California's Djerassi Foundation, and awards from the Argentinean Academy of Fine Arts, the International Music Council in Paris,

San Antonio Festival, and the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Major commissions include 'Viviane of Avalon' for voice and orchestra (Presences Festival, Paris); 'Saga', for piano, violin and chamber ensemble (Miller Theatre, New York); 'The Loss and the Silence' a string quartet written for the Juilliard School's Centennial; 'The Wanderer', a choral setting of a tenth century Anglo-Saxon text (Chanticleer - Chicago A Cappella); 'Beowulf: Scyld's Burial' for voices and percussion (National Chamber Choir of Ireland - Cork Music Festival), and 'Sonetos de Amor', a multimedia show based on the poetry of Pablo Neruda (Jebediah Foundation - Lincoln Center, New York.)

Energetically committed to the music of our time, pianist STEPHEN GOSLING has performed throughout the world. His playing has been hailed as "brilliant," "electric," and "luminous and poised" by the New York Times, and possessing "utter clarity and conviction" by the Washington Post. He is a member of the New York New Music Ensemble, Columbia Sinfonietta, Ensemble Sospeso, and Ne(x)works. Gosling moved to New York from England at the age of eighteen to study with Oxana Yablonskaya at the Juilliard School, where his awards included the Mennin Prize for Outstanding Excellence and Leadership in Music and the Sony Elevated Standards Fellowship. He was also featured as concerto soloist an unprecedented four times. Mr. Gosling has performed with the New Juilliard Ensemble and the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, and at MOMA's Summergarden; Kennedy Center's Friedheim Awards; Lincoln Center's Chamber Music Society "Great Day in New York" festival, and Zankel Hall's inaugural concert. He is also a frequent guest artist of the New York Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Orpheus, Speculum Musicae, Ensemble 21, Absolute Ensemble, Continuum, SEM Ensemble, DaCapo Chamber Players, and Da Camera of Houston. Mr. Gosling has made over 30 recordings for Albany, Bridge, Capstone, Centaur, CRI, Innova, Koch, Mode, Morrison Music Trust, Naxos, New World Records, and Rattle Records.

Piu lento

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il canto ben marcato

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Tempo 1

EZEQUIEL VIÑAO: excerpt from "The Birds Set Out" (facsimile of the manuscript)

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VIÑAO, EZEQUIEL (b.1960)

SIMURGH, book I : "The Conference of the Birds"
for piano and electronics (1991)

1. Invocation 3'39

2. The Conference Opens 12'10

2A. The Conference Opens: Part I 4'36

2B. The Conference Opens: Part II 2'00

2C. The Conference Opens: Part III 5'34

3. The Birds Set Out 4'16

TT: 20'05

STEPHEN GOSLING piano

EZEQUIEL VIÑAO electronics

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